CHAPTER EIGHT

Protectorate Development

THE people of all the States of the Protectorate are, for the most part, hardworking and competent farmers depending as they do primarily on agriculture for their living. Fate has not treated them very kindly, having so arranged matters that the areas with the most tillable land have the smallest rainfall. The absence of rain is compensated for in some places by the presence of water-courses which, though dry for most of the year, become flooded during the late summer and autumn when there is, normally, heavy rain in the hills. These flood waters have, in Lahej and in Abiyan and in one or two other areas, been harnessed and an irrigation system spreads the water over the land and the valuable cotton and other crops are the result.

The idea of developing the Abiyan plain was conceived by Brian Hartley, the then Director of Agriculture in 1940, when shortage of foodstuffs, due to the World War, turned everyone's thoughts to finding alternative local sources of supply which would not be affected by shortage of shipping and the interruption of normal sea communications. Abiyan is a flat open plain triangular in shape with the apex buried in the Yafa hills and the broad base along the shores of the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean. It slopes gently from north to south and it is intersected by two large Wadis, the Bana and the Hassan. These two Wadis run far up into the highlands of the Yemen and every summer the seasonal floods come rushing down them as the rain clouds from the Indian Ocean break over the distant hills. These floods are rich in silt which fertilises the soil on which it is deposited. Hundreds of years ago

241 Hundreds of years ago Aden
133 the value of these silt-laden seasonal floods was realised by the
312 people of the plain, and they initiated an elaborate irrigation
134 system, the remains of which exist to the present day. Years of
926 inter-tribal warfare which benefited no-one, brought the original system to ruin and the land went out of cultivation and the silt-laden waters rushed unimpeded headlong to the sea to discolour the ocean for many miles.

654 Hartley started with a modest capital of £10,000 granted
312 by His Majesty's Government for the purchase of seed grain
241 and for the hiring of bullocks to build dams and till the ground;
648 and with this modest sum he was able to bring 700 acres under
[926] cultivation. The tribes were loath to give up what had become their battle-field, and their silly futile squabbles interrupted Hartley's efforts until the patience of the Aden Government was exhausted and measures were taken to enforce security in the area.

648 Once the World War was over, food production was no
654 longer of paramount importance, and with the economic
• 248 future of the area in mind long staple Egyptian cotton cultiva-
178 tion was successfully introduced, and by an Administrative Order of my predecessor, an organisation known as the Abiyan Board was set up to manage the whole agricultural project. Additional capital to the extent of £270,000 was obtained as a loan from His Majesty's Government and there was rapid development, so that by the time I became Governor several thousand acres were under cotton cultivation. The Board directed the agricultural policy of the area, was responsible for pest control, owned and operated the heavy agricultural machinery necessary for the economic working of the land, owned and operated two cotton ginning factories, controlled the distribution of flood water through the irrigation canals and channels, and was responsible for the shipping and marketing of the cotton crop.

648 In spite of the changed circumstances of the Board they continued to function by virtue of the original Administrative Order. All efforts by my predecessor to regularise the position by persuading the Fadli and Lower Yafa States, within whose territories Abiyan is situated, to enact decrees failed owing to